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Modul für elektro-optische Signalumwandlung

Module pour la conversion électro-optique

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- **NEC Fibre Optics Catalogue, 4th Edition (1986), pages 322-326**
- **WO 88/10441**

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Description

Background of the Invention

The invention relates to a device for electro-optical signal conversion comprising a housing provided with electro-optical signal conversion means and electrical and optical contact elements coupled thereto.

The transmission of signals by optical means, for example via a glass fibre cable, is increasingly used in practice. In addition to the generally greater transmission capacity of optical links compared with electrical or electromagnetic links, the former are furthermore insensitive to electromagnetic phenomena such as lightning strikes or electromagnetic pulses, it is difficult to "tap off" signals and there is no danger of electromagnetic radiation as a result of the antenna function of the cable.

If the signal processing takes place electronically, an electro-optical signal conversion has to be carried out. In practice, two different systems can, in principle, be distinguished for this purpose.

In the one case, such as described by US-A-4,678,264 and US-A-4,762,388, one or more electro-optical converters are permanently installed on the printed circuit board which carries the components for the electronic signal processing. In this case, the optical cable may be permanently connected or connected via an optical connector joint to said converters. In the other case, such as described by US-A-4,756,593, US-A-4,720,630 and DE-A-3,524,430 an end of the optical cable is permanently connected to one or more electro-optical converters which may be connected in turn, permanently or via an electrical connector joint, to the electronic processing means.

These methods used in practice both have the disadvantage that it is necessary to know in advance, that is to say before the assembly of the electronic signal processing means, whether an optical link is used and where the electro-optical converters are situated, that is to say on the printed circuit board or in the optical cable. In this connection, the risk of damage is greater in the case of electro-optical converters permanently attached to a cable end than in the case of converters installed on the printed circuit board for the electronic signal processing components. During the installation, replacement or repair of the optical cable, damage to the wiring circuit for the electro-optical converters may be caused, inter alia, by insufficiently careful or rough use, by shocks, impacts and the like. In addition, the two systems are not mutually interchangeable, that is to say an optical cable provided with an optical connector cannot be used with a printed circuit board provided with an electrical connector.

It is observed that "NEC Fibre Optics Catalogue", 4th Edition (1986), pages 322-326, shows a light source which comprises a housing provided with electro-optical signal conversion means, which housing has electrical contact means to be connected to an electrical connector

and optical contact means to be connected to an optical connector, which in turn is connected to a fibre cable able to transmit light signals received from the light source. The electrical contact means are arranged to receive electrical modulated input signal.

Summary of the Invention

In order to provide a free choice between electrical or optical signal transmission, the invention provides an electro-optical adapting connector comprising a housing provided with electrical and optical contact means and electro-optical signal conversion means coupled therebetween, said electrical and optical contact means being situated in one or more of the sides of the housing and being designed as plug and/or socket contact elements for contacting mating socket and/or plug contact elements of electrical and optical connector means, respectively, the housing being provided with latching means for detachably locking said connector means to be coupled to said adapting connector, and said electro-optical signal conversion means being arranged to convert electrical signals at said electrical contact means into optical signals at said optical contact means and/or vice versa. Latching means for the mutual coupling of connectors are generally known per se in practice.

Compared with the systems known in practice, the device according to the invention is distinguished in that it acts as an adapting connector.

The invention is based on the idea of providing an electro-optical adapting connector with which, if desired, electronic processing means can mutually interchange signals via an optical link. The electronic processing means can now be assembled even without previous knowledge of the manner of signal transmission as is usual for making contact thereto via an electrical connector joint. Without using the device according to the invention, signals can be transmitted electrically, while optical signal transmission is possible using the adapting connector. Conversely, an original optical link can easily be replaced by an electrical link, for example in the case of malfunction or for test purposes.

If a separate adapting connector is used, the risk of damage due to mechanical effects is furthermore less than in the case of an adapter permanently connected to an optical cable. In the case of damage or malfunction in the adapting connector according to the invention, it can easily be replaced without further installation operations such as fitting it to an optical cable or on a printed circuit board.

In the preferred embodiment of the device according to the invention, the electrical and optical contact elements are situated at opposite sides of the housing.

Depending on the direction in which the signals have to be exchanged, the electro-optical signal conversion means in the device according to the invention can be designed for only converting electrical signals into optical ones, for only converting optical signals into elec-

trical ones or, if signal transmission via the optical cable is necessary in two directions, for both. If necessary, separate conversion means for only converting electrical signals into optical ones and separate conversion means for only converting optical signals into electrical ones may be accommodated inside one housing, for example, for coupling an optical connector to which a plurality of optical fibres are connected.

The invention is explained below with reference to a preferred embodiment of an adapting connector according to the invention.

Brief Description of the Drawing

Figure 1 shows diagrammatically and in perspective an embodiment of the device according to the invention flanked on either side by, respectively, electrical and optical connector means, and

Figure 2 shows diagrammatically, on an enlarged scale, a partially cut-away plan view of the device according to the invention as shown in Figure 1.

Detailed Description of the Embodiment

The preferred embodiment, shown in Figure 1, of the adapting connector for electro-optical signal conversion according to the invention, below termed an adapter for short, comprises a housing 1, for example made of plastic. At one side 2 thereof electrical contact elements (not shown) are situated and at the opposite side 3 there are two optical contact elements 4 for detachably making contact to an optical plug 5 having an optical cable 6 connected thereto, for example an optical cable comprising two glass fibres.

The electrical contact elements at the side 2 are designed to make contact to an electrical connector 7 which may be situated on a printed circuit board on which the components for the electronic signal processing are arranged. Of course, this may also be an electrical connector mounted in a frame or chassis.

At the side 3, the housing 1 is provided with an opening 8, serving as a guide, for receiving a sheath 9 surrounding optical contact elements 10 of the optical plug 5. If necessary, the optical contact elements 4 of the adapter may be provided with lenses (not shown) for focusing and guiding the light rays from the optical plug 5. To latch the optical plug 5 to the housing 1, the former is provided on either side with outwardly spring-loaded latching hooks 11 each having a slot-type opening 12. At the side 3, the housing 1 has receiving openings 13 for receiving the latching hooks 11. Situated in said receiving openings 13 is a boss 14 which, in the assembled state of the adapter and the optical plug 5, engages in the opening 12 of a latching hook 11. The latch can be uncoupled by moving the two latching hooks 11 manually in the direction of the housing of the optical plug 5.

The optical connector plug 5 and receptable housing interface 4, 8, 13, 14 and latching hooks 11 of this type are disclosed in U.S. patent 4,762,388 assigned to Applicant.

To lock the adapter to the electrical connector 7, the housing 1 is provided at a flat side with a lever-type latching element 15 with bosses 16 which are situated at the end and which, in the assembled state, engage in matchingly situated openings 17 in the housing of the electrical connector 7. The latch can be undone by moving the latching element 15 at the end 18 in the direction of the housing 1. A latching element of this type is described in the European Patent Application 401,937 in the name of Applicant.

Figure 2 shows the adapter according to Figure 1 on an enlarged scale in which the housing 1 has been partially cut away at the flat side remotely situated from the latching element 15. The electrical contact elements 19 at the side 2 are designed as contact sockets for making contact to the contact pins 20 of the connector 7. Furthermore, the electrical components for the signal conversion mounted on a printed circuit board 21 are partially visible.

Said components may comprise one or more photoelectric converters such as a photo cell and the like and/or one or more light emitting elements such as an LED ("light emitting diode"). This is not, however, of importance for the understanding of the present invention. Any type of converter for converting electrical signals into optical ones or optical signals into electrical ones may be used in the adapter. In order to limit the dimensions of the adapter as much as possible, it is preferable to use integrated semiconductor circuit components such as, for example, the integrated circuit IC 22. The power supply to these circuit components is obtained via one or more of the contact elements 19, for example with the insertion of a resistor 23.

It will be clear that the adapter according to the invention may be provided, at a plurality of sides of the housing 1, with electrical and/or optical contact elements for making contact to a plurality of electrical and/or optical connector means.

The optical contact elements 4 can, of course, also be constructed as a plug contact similar to the optical plug 5, while the contact elements 19 can be constructed as contact pins, contact fingers and the like, if necessary arranged in a plurality of mutually offset rows. The latching of the connector means at the housing 1 may also be achieved in any manner known per se in practice.

By the suitable construction of the housing 1 and the suitable arrangement of the electrical and optical contact elements, the adapter according to the invention can be rendered suitable for any type of electrical and optical connector.

Claims

1. An electro-optical adapting connector comprising a housing (1) provided with electrical (19) and optical (4) contact means and electro-optical signal conversion means (21, 22) coupled therebetween, said electrical (19) and optical (4) contact means being situated in one or more of the sides of the housing (1) and being designed as plug and/or socket contact elements for contacting mating socket and/or plug contact elements of electrical (7) and optical (5) connector means, respectively, the housing (1) being provided with latching means (13, 14; 15, 16) for detachably locking said connector means (5; 7) to be coupled to said adapting connector, and said electro-optical signal conversion means (21, 22) being arranged to convert electrical signals at said electrical contact means (19) into optical signals at said optical contact means (4) and/or vice versa.
2. A device according to Claim 1, wherein the electrical contact elements (19) are situated at different sides of the housing (1).
3. A device according to Claim 1 or 2 wherein the optical contact elements (4) are situated at different sides of the housing (1).
4. A device according to Claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the electrical (19) and optical contact elements (4) are situated at opposite sides (2, 3) of the housing (1).
5. A device according to Claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the signal conversion means (21, 22) are designed for converting electrical signals into optical ones.
6. A device according to Claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the signal conversion means (21, 22) are designed for converting optical signals into electrical ones.
7. A device according to Claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the signal conversion means (21, 22) are designed for converting electrical signals into optical ones and optical signals into electrical ones.

Patentansprüche

1. Elektro-optischer Zwischenstecker mit einem Gehäuse (1), das mit elektrischen (19) und optischen (4) Kontaktelementen und zwischen diesen gekoppelten elektro-optischen Signalumwandlungselementen (21, 22) versehen ist, wobei die elektrischen (19) und optischen (4) Kontaktelemente in einer oder mehreren der Seiten des Gehäuses (1) angeordnet sind und als Stecker- und/oder Buchsen-Kontaktelemente zur Verbindungsherstellung mit passenden Buchsen- und/oder Stecker-Kontakt-

elementen eines elektrischen (7) bzw. optischen (5) Steckverbinders ausgebildet sind, wobei das Gehäuse (1) mit Verriegelungselementen (13, 14; 15, 16) zum lösbaren Verriegeln der mit dem Zwischenstecker zu koppelnden Steckverbinder (5; 7) versehen ist und die elektro-optischen Signalumwandlungselemente (21, 22) so ausgebildet sind, daß sie elektrische Signale an den elektrischen Kontaktelementen (19) in optische Signale an den optischen Kontaktelementen (4) umwandeln und/oder umgekehrt.

2. Vorrichtung gemäß Anspruch 1, in welcher die elektrischen Kontaktelemente (19) an verschiedenen Seiten des Gehäuses (1) angeordnet sind.
3. Vorrichtung gemäß Anspruch 1 oder 2, in welcher die optischen Kontaktelemente (4) an verschiedenen Seiten des Gehäuses (1) angeordnet sind.
4. Vorrichtung gemäß Anspruch 1, 2 oder 3, in welcher die elektrischen (19) und optischen Kontaktelemente (4) an entgegengesetzten Seiten (2, 3) des Gehäuses (1) angeordnet sind.
5. Vorrichtung gemäß Anspruch 1, 2, 3 oder 4, in welcher die Signalumwandlungselemente (21, 22) zum Umwandeln elektrischer Signale in optische ausgebildet sind.
6. Vorrichtung gemäß Anspruch 1, 2, 3 oder 4, in welcher die Signalumwandlungselemente (21, 22) zum Umwandeln optischer Signale in elektrische ausgebildet sind.
7. Vorrichtung gemäß Anspruch 1, 2, 3 oder 4, in welcher die Signalumwandlungselemente (21, 22) zum Umwandeln elektrischer Signale in optische und optischer Signale in elektrische ausgebildet sind.

Revendications

1. Un connecteur d'adaptation électro-optique, comprenant un boîtier (1) muni de moyens de contact électriques (19) et optiques (4) et de moyens de conversion électro-optiques de signaux (21, 22), couplés localement entre eux, lesdits moyens de contact électriques (19) et optiques (4) étant situés sur l'une ou plusieurs des faces du boîtier (1), et présentant la forme d'éléments de contact mâles et/ou femelles pour venir respectivement en contact avec des éléments de contact femelles ou mâles correspondants des moyens de connexion électriques (7) et optiques (5), le boîtier (1) étant muni de moyens de verrouillage (13, 14; 15, 16) pour verrouiller de façon amovible lesdits moyens de connexion (5; 7) destinés à être couplés audit connecteur.

teur d'adaptation, et lesdits moyens électro-optiques de conversion de signal (21, 22) étant disposés de sorte à convertir les signaux électriques présents sur lesdits moyens de contact électrique (19) en signaux optiques présents sur lesdits moyens de contact optique (4) et/ou l'inverse. 5

2. Un dispositif selon la revendication 1, dans lequel les éléments de contact électrique (19) sont situés sur des faces différentes du boîtier (1). 10
3. Un dispositif selon la revendication 1 ou 2, dans lequel les éléments de contact optique (4) sont situés sur des faces différentes du boîtier (1). 15
4. Un dispositif selon la revendication 1, 2 ou 3, dans lequel les éléments de contact électriques (19) et optiques (4) sont situés sur des faces opposées (2, 3) du boîtier (1). 20
5. Un dispositif selon la revendication 1, 2, 3 ou 4, dans lequel les moyens de conversion de signal (21, 22) sont conçus pour convertir des signaux électriques en signaux optiques. 25
6. Un dispositif selon la revendication 1, 2, 3 ou 4, dans lequel les moyens de conversion de signal (21, 22) sont conçus pour convertir des signaux optiques en signaux électriques. 30
7. Un dispositif selon la revendication 1, 2, 3 ou 4, dans lequel les moyens de conversion de signal (21, 22) sont conçus pour convertir des signaux électriques en signaux optiques et des signaux optiques en signaux électriques. 35

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fig-1

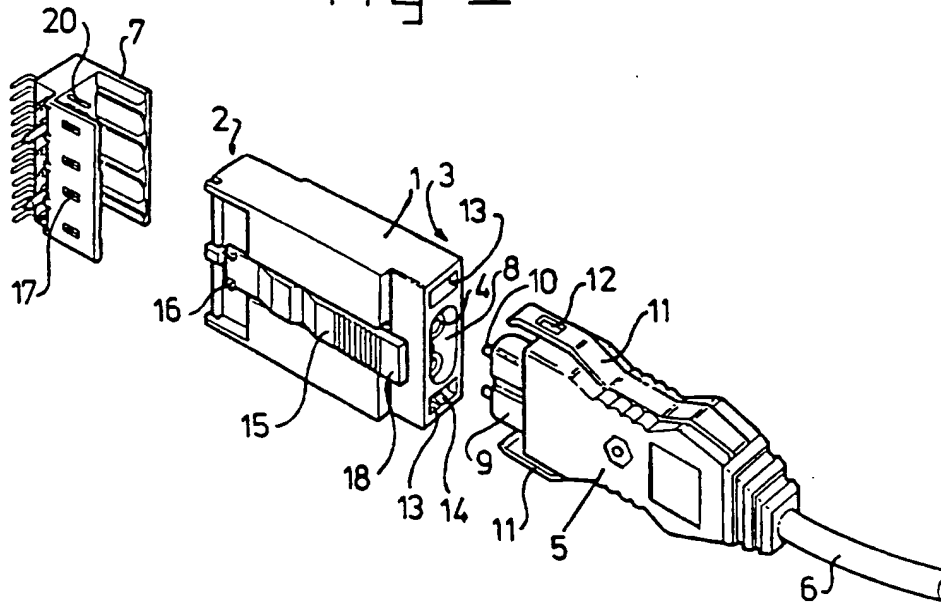


fig-2

